



WEST END LIBRARY FRIENDS STAKEHOLDERS COMMITTEE

**GUIDELINES FOR A NEW OR FULLY RENOVATED BRANCH
LIBRARY**

FINAL REPORT

JULY 18, 2008

WEST END LIBRARY FRIENDS

c/o West End Library, 24th & L Streets, NW, Washington, DC 20037

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

In September, 2007, the West End Library Friends established a Stakeholders Committee, made up of business and residential representatives of the Dupont Circle, Foggy Bottom, and West End neighborhoods. This group agreed to conduct a transparent, collaborative process that would develop comprehensive recommendations for an ideal branch library. The Committee took into consideration the District of Columbia Public Library (DCPL) building program for branch libraries, the educational, enrichment, and service needs of the neighborhood, the best use of resources and meeting rooms, and the need for an efficient physical plant and optimum location. The Committee made recommendations to resolve operational issues, and set forth a set of principles to guide the quality, sustainability, integration, and functionality of a new or renovated branch library. The West End Library Friends urge that these principles be part of any future Request For Proposal process, or design discussion relating to the development and programming needs of the library and Square 37, the property on which the branch is located.

Over a ten-month period the Committee:

- Conducted a survey and held a public meeting to gather information and public comment on what the Dupont Circle, Foggy Bottom and West End communities wanted in a new or renovated branch library.
- Submitted an initial report on the results of the customer survey and posted on the Friends' website additional community comments from a March public meeting.
- Examined best practices for successful branch libraries in the region and elsewhere.
- Researched issues that are specific to the West End branch or endemic to the library system as a whole.
- Recommended and implemented short and long-term solutions to issues that impeded the use of the library.
- Forwarded recommendations for the footprint, physical plant, and exterior design to the DCPL Board of Trustees and Chief Librarian, as well as to the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development and the District of Columbia Office of Planning.
- Committed to writing a final report before the end of July 2008.

A summary of Committee recommendations are as follows:

- Before the West End branch undergoes construction, an interim library must be open at a convenient location in the Dupont Circle/Foggy Bottom/West End neighborhood, and continue to provide branch library services until the new or renovated branch is opened.
- A well-designed process for community involvement should be adopted for any further planning process.

- The branch should be re-branded to reflect that it is the center of the Dupont Circle, Foggy Bottom, and West End communities and used by all three.
- The West End Friends Customer Service Survey provides good guidance to planners on what people in the community think about the current library and what they would like to see in a new or renovated branch. The recommendations from the Survey listed in this report should be followed.
- The guidelines for the footprint and physical plant for a new or renovated library submitted to the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development and the District of Columbia Office of Planning, the DCPL Board of Trustees and Chief Librarian dated April 23, 2008, and listed in this report should be followed.
- The Stakeholders Committee for the West End Library Friends reviewed the Building Program Summary for the West End dated May 23, 2008, and endorses the same with the additions/clarifications listed herein.
- The final design for the West End Library should ensure that the building is easy to maintain, and the economic and development covenants need to ensure that funds are included for ongoing building maintenance and operations.
- The collection for the West End Library needs to reflect the requests and recorded use of its patrons. A Collection Building and Maintenance policy for Adults, Young Adults, and Children should be implemented. More literary fiction recommended by the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Best Sellers* is warranted, limiting duplicates to high demand items, adding more CD's and DVD's, less self-help material, and a concentration on major authors should be implemented. A list of Core Collections Considerations is again listed herein.
- The West End Library should be more user-friendly and incorporate self-help stations.
- A marketing program for the West End Library needs to be developed. Current programs are not well attended because patrons do not know they exist.
- The West End Library should be open and welcoming to every person who wants to use it. However, the consistent use of the branch as a day center by the downtown homeless population, not unique to the West End, is a major deterrent to other patrons wishing to use the branch. Therefore, the Committee has made and implemented several recommendations that will mitigate the use of the branch by those without a home base. These recommendations rearrange the reading room, brighten the interior and exterior of the building, and suggest programming to attract more of the non-homeless patron.

THE PROCESS:

The West End Library Friends developed and submitted to DCPL a strategic plan, “Plan of Action/Outline for Change,” in September 2006. This plan was used as an outline for the Stakeholders work product and background to recruit individuals who live or work in the Dupont Circle, Foggy Bottom, and West End neighborhoods. All members of the Committee have a history of volunteering in their communities, have an established network allowing them to relay information accurately and quickly, and have a business expertise that strengthened the Committee as a whole. All members agreed to bring no political agenda or opinion as to the development of Square 37 to this planning process, and were willing to devote time to see the project through to the final report.

An experienced facilitator was hired to keep the Committee on task, decision driven (all decisions were made by the entire Committee) and to make sure that any unfinished business was carried over to the next meeting.

The Committee established procedures/rules of engagement that included a set meeting day and time each month, the taking and approving of meeting minutes, agreeing that written reports and an agenda would be sent out prior to each meeting, and Committee assignments would be completed in a timely manner. As a group we agreed on topics of discussion, made research assignments, developed a timeline, studied best practices of other branch libraries in the region, and attended the building branches forum sponsored by DCPL.

The Committee developed an apolitical mission statement that was very specific and revisited it often to make sure all tasks were within the mission.

Adhering to all the above allowed the Committee to finish its tasks three months early and reinforced the fact that a well-constructed process leads to community involvement and results.

AREAS OF CONCENTRATION

Research:

The West End Library Friends conducted a survey of community members from December 2007 to January, 2008, to learn how library users as well as neighbors who do not use the library feel about the services and physical state of the current branch library and what they would consider to be important features in a new or renovated West End Library branch.

The survey was developed by the West End Library Friends Stakeholders Committee. Surveys were collected both electronically on Zoomerang.com and in hard copy. Surveys were mailed to the members of the Foggy Bottom Association and West End Library Friends and Committee members distributed them to eight to ten condo and apartment buildings in the neighborhood. The surveys were distributed at the West End Library and

at meetings of the Dupont Circle and West End/Foggy Bottom ANC and the Foggy Bottom Association. The online version of the survey was advertised in the *Foggy Bottom Current* as well as on the Library Friends website and the George Washington University Friends site. Notice was also given through the Foggy Bottom Association website, church bulletins, Jack Evans's Newsletter, and again by e-mail to Foggy Bottom Association members.

Of the 348 self-selected respondents, 229 filled out the online survey and 119 returned the paper survey. This is not a scientific survey since the respondents were not randomly selected; however, because significant outreach was made to library users and people who actively participate in community/civic groups, the data reflect the opinions of people who use and care about the West End branch library. It provides good guidance to planners on what people in the community think about the current library and what they would like to see in a new or renovated branch.

A public meeting to review the survey findings and solicit further public comment was held on March 5, 2008, and, with few exceptions, these comments mirrored the survey findings.

The most current demographics, customer profiles, and staff interviews/observations were also used to determine the customer base and the type of services needed in a new or renovated library.

Research Results and Recommendations:

The West End Library is used primarily for traditional library services, such as borrowing books, reference work, and meetings. There is a strong sense in the community, reflected in survey answers and appended written comments, that the homeless population's use of the library is a deterrent to greater use by other patrons. Other barriers to use are clearly the general condition of the building and its public facilities, as reflected in answers about how comfortable and safe people feel in the library.

Those who do use the library are older, wealthier, better educated, and less racially diverse than the general population of the District; and, therefore, the collection, programs, and services for this particular branch, like all branches, should be tailored to the population it serves.

People in the community see substantive room for improvement in the West End Library and would like most of this improvement to center on traditional resources and services. However, there is also a desire to see a broadening of the library's mission, programs, and facilities.

The following observations, conclusions, and recommendations are based on the West End Library Stakeholders Committee review of the survey results, reviewing best practices of other libraries, and comments collected at the March 5, 2008 community meeting:

- The survey results are significant because the demographics of the respondents are representative of the people who the West End librarians and Friends know to be its users.
- The survey respondents live in, and are actively engaged in, the West End community (given their high participation in other community activities), and their responses should be given great consideration in planning for improvements to the library.
- The fact that so many users walk to the library suggests that great caution should be taken in considering any location change.
- The results of the survey highlighted things that can and should be done in the near future that will improve the library and respond to issues raised by the data. These include:
 - Investing in improvements to the collections.
 - Reinstating the external book drop (Completed in May, 2008.)
 - The library should offer better programs and marketing of same, e.g., authors and book readings. Increase in children programs must be age specific.
 - Improve security and the perception of safety by adjusting the internal layout to separate the children's area from the reading area where the homeless people congregate. (Completed in May, 2008.)
 - Better marketing of the upstairs conference rooms so that community members know that they are currently available for general use.
 - Allow adults to use computers in the children's section when there are no children present and the adult computers are all occupied.
- A new branch library design should include:
 - A much more comfortable and welcoming physical space that lifts the spirits of the people who use it. Fluorescent lights and green walls are institutional looking and dated.
 - Respondents want an accessible community room/gathering place.
 - More discrete spaces for different functions and users, such as a community center, more flexible open space, meeting rooms, a periodical room, functional outdoor space, and dedicated space for the children's section and seniors.
- Observations concerning homeless persons' occupying a large portions of the library for long periods of time include:
 - The library should be open and welcoming to every person who wants to use the library for its intended use.
 - Comments from survey respondents suggest that the primary reason people do not feel safe in the library is because of the presence of so many homeless people.

- This atmosphere is a major deterrent to non-homeless patrons wishing to use the Library.
- The lack of adequate hygiene by some homeless people is a deterrent to others using the library. There should be minimum hygiene standards for all library patrons.
- The reading room and tables are often occupied exclusively by homeless people and their possessions, making the West End Branch look like a day center for those living on the street.
- There should not be additional homeless programs offered in the library that are unrelated to core library functions.
- The space and flow of movement through the space should be designed to allow people to use the core library services without having to pass through the places where homeless people are using the library to simply hang out.

The full survey data, initial survey results, and public comments are available on the West End Library page of the DCPL website: www.dclibrary.org. Click on “Hours and Locations;” then, “WestEnd,” then “Initial Report on the West End Library Friends Customer Survey 2.21.08.”

Guidelines for the Footprint/Physical Plant:

- A new or renovated library should remain on Square 37. The preferred location is the same, at the corner of L and 24th Streets, N.W.; however, other orientations on Square 37 could be considered if there are compelling advantages for the library patrons and use by the larger community.
- The main entrance to the library should have significant street presence and should remain at street level.
- The new or renovated building should incorporate as many sustainability features as possible. It should be known as a “green” building.
- There should be adequate public space that is accessible to the community beyond library hours and that is adaptable in design so that different size meeting rooms can be created.
- The footprint should be adequate to accommodate a branch library and the interior should be designed for flexibility to serve a variety of uses and needs that may change over time.
- The building should be architecturally pleasing and iconic, so that the library will be known as a neighborhood center and the place to meet.
- There should be adequate parking for cars and bicycles.
- The building must be ADA compliant.
- There should be adequate attractive exterior lighting.
- The library should have an environmental system that can be controlled on site and creates a pleasant comfortable environment using natural light.
- There should be community cultural amenity space, i.e., a lecture hall/music room, which can be used in support of the art institutions in the neighborhood.

- There should be small office spaces for use by the local ANC's and community associations.
- A state of the art, comprehensive security system, should be designed and installed.
- There should be attractive, well-landscaped grounds and accessible inviting sidewalk space and entrances.
- All architects contracted to work on the library should be knowledgeable about library design.
- There should be a coffee shop with an outside entrance.
- There should be an outside community bulletin board incorporated into the exterior design.

DCPL Library Building Program Summary:

The Stakeholders Committee for the West End Library Friends reviewed the Building Program Summary for the West End dated May 23, 2008, and endorses the same with the additions and clarifications listed below:

- That the new branch be an anchor to any planned development on Square 37 and that the building serve the needs of the Dupont Circle, Foggy Bottom, and West End neighborhoods, not just the West End. This is implied now, but a new branch may require re-branding or renaming to clearly designate the scope of the neighborhoods served.
- The implementation of new technology will undoubtedly shrink the total building square footage; however, with a 23% core factor, 10% unassigned space, and dual use of space planned, the program can be made more efficient.
- A conference room and meeting rooms should be located in the front of the building or have separate, controlled entrances so that they can be easily used after hours.
- A section of the circulation desk should be a designated "laptop computer lending" area and there should be computers dedicated to the library database only.
- One section of the circulation desk should be lower so that it is accessible to wheelchair bound patrons and children. The height of the current circulation desk intimidates both.
- There should be a designated room or display for Dupont Circle, Foggy Bottom, and West End history--artifacts and writings. The branch and the civic associations have collected artifacts over the years, and we believe that displaying the same would benefit the community and bring more patrons to the library. The display cases in the pre-function area outside the meeting rooms could serve this purpose.

- There should be a high-tech area to show movies and possibly other programming. The West End Branch needs a small lecture room for community use.
- Electronic signage/ flat screen TV panels/or newer technology should be part of the structure so that the branch can market upcoming programs and the community can announce upcoming events as done with a ticker tape sign.
- The Building Program Summary should implicitly state that any new or renovated building design and development must take into consideration structural maintenance and the adequate funding of ongoing operations

Core Collection Considerations:

The Stakeholders Committee reviewed the revised core collection policy for the library system as well as from other libraries and the recent technological updates of digital materials and downloading capabilities. The Committee, with the assistance of the West End Library staff and the DCPL Collections Policy Manager, recommend the following Core Collection Considerations:

- **Collection Building**

ADULT:

Purchase more literary fiction. Acquire books reviewed/recommended by the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* as well as *Best Sellers*. Review “Summer Reading” and end-of-year *Best Books* lists to make sure that they are available at DCPL.

Limit duplicate copies to high demand items. We need very few duplicates of routine nonfiction and self-help. Limit self-help selections, concentrating on major authors.

Implement system so that individual branches can make recommendations and respond quickly to sudden demands.

Develop meaningful profiles that move away from “one size fits all” for our diverse system.

Increase DVD, CD, and audio book holdings. Expand the classic and non-fiction audio collection. Expand DVD special interest collections: film noir, foreign films, travel documentaries, etc.

Expand foreign language learning materials.

Update print reference collection as appropriate.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULT:

Fewer duplicate copies of new release picture books.

Fewer young adult duplicates.

More new release graphic novels for children and young adults.

More new release DVDs for children and young adults.

New reference collection for young adults.

Expand parent/teacher collection.

- **Collection Maintenance**

Develop a systematic approach to weeding and replacement so that the library always has updated general non-fiction (i.e., health, finance, design, etc.) and fresh copies of classics and popular backlist fiction.

Design an ongoing survey for use of West End customers to suggest specific titles and make general recommendations.

Create a Friends of the West End Library Collections Consideration Committee to review collection concerns and make any needed adjustments based on feedback from customers.

- **Other**

Put together more recommended reading book lists: Best Biographies, Award Winners, Beach Books, etc.

Acquire dedicated public reference computer(s) to provide on-site access to DCPL databases.

Promote and provide training for DCPL's expanding digital holdings. Work with West End Library staff to create promotional programs such as "The Low Down on Downloading." Involve teen aides in instructing community members in the use of new digital format technologies.

Marketing:

The Stakeholders Committee acknowledges the many and varied programs that are part of the West End Library's services. However, the library does a poor job in marketing these programs and the branch resources. A formal marketing program to attract those patrons who should use the West End Library needs to be developed.

Two marketing suggestions are to change the greeting on the library voice mail to one that promotes current programs and setting up "take-one, leave-one" book shelves for donated books at the Library and other places in the community.

Issues specific to the West End Branch

The West End Library should be open and welcoming to every person who wants to use it. However, the constant use of the branch by a large homeless population is a major deterrent to other patrons wishing to use the branch. Therefore, the Committee spent a considerable amount of time educating itself about homeless issues—the reasons people become homeless, the policies regarding use of the library by the homeless, and the advocacy programs designed to help this segment of our population. The group wanted to find a way of balancing the needs and rights of all patrons.

Through the Friends and library staff, several short-term and long-term strategies are being implemented to create a place that is open and inviting to all and that does not enable one group or user to discourage others from feeling comfortable or welcome in the library.

These strategies include:

- Rearranging the reading room so that users cannot congregate.
- Reducing the number of tables.
- Adding stand-up computer-only tables.
- Adding topical kiosks with small book displays at the library entrance.
- Removing the parking meters in front of the building so that belongings cannot be tied there.
- Asking that the staff be trained quarterly in how to work with the homeless.
- Prominently displaying the DCPL behavior guidelines.
- Asking the local police and DCPL security to patrol the building at night.
- Expanding the behavior guidelines so that there is a limit of one bag per patron.
- Supporting Mayor Fenty's "Housing First" initiative by requesting that our most vulnerable homeless be interviewed for immediate housing and accompanying services.
- Requesting that computer use time be shortened and that some computers be limited to DCPL database only.
- Setting up a program to give excess books that have been donated for the Friends book sale to Miriam's Kitchen for education and lending purposes.
- Looking into providing flex space for outreach services.

- Enlisting other neighborhood groups to help fund programs that work to place the homeless in better living environments.
- Marketing our programs so that the general public does not think of the West End Library as a de facto homeless day center.
- Requesting that outdoor feeding stations be relocated.
- Making the reading room more visible.
- Reversing the entrance and exit doors.
- Adding more outside lighting.
- Providing a list of resources and services for the homeless.
- Installing security cameras.

Final copies of this report, the customer service survey, and all pertinent committee reports will be on file at the West End Library and at the Martin Luther King Library.

Respectfully submitted,

The West End Library Friends
Stakeholders Committee